

ADAPTING TO MULTI-LEVEL POLITICS: THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE GENERAL ELECTION IN SCOTLAND

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General Elections have always been very British affairs. As contests to decide which party will form the next UK government, they have tended to accentuate the British dimension of politics throughout the country. This British contest dominates the campaign in Scotland as elsewhere, but it coincides with a distinctively Scottish dimension. A distinctive party system and the need to defend or re-negotiate Scotland's place in the Union has ensured that, alongside the British election, a parallel election takes place between the parties in Scotland. The contest in Scotland is principally concerned with determining which party can best represent Scottish interests and get the best deal for Scotland in the UK. This has been closely related to the politics of Union and of Scottish home rule and, from 1974-1997, British elections in Scotland commonly reflected a battle between parties purporting to represent the best channel for voicing Scotland's demands for self-government.

The balance between the British and Scottish dimension in General Elections has varied over time, but since devolution, the British character of General Elections in Scotland has become more prevalent. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament has (perhaps temporarily) removed the home rule issue from the British election contest. Although a Scottish dimension remains, particularly with respect to the parallel contest between the Scottish parties, the campaign in Scotland in 2005 was less distinctive than in previous General Elections over recent years. The issues that dominated the party campaigns in Scotland were also prevalent in the election campaign south of the border. Yet, the Scottish Parliament has fundamentally altered the context

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in which British General Elections take place. Scotland continues to send representatives to the House of Commons, but they are no longer responsible for those areas of domestic policy that have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament. These changes created challenges and tensions for those engaged in the election campaign, and should influence how we interpret the election results. The first two sections of this article explore the campaign and the performance of the Scottish parties in the 2005 General Election in light of the emergence of multi-level politics, while the final section considers how the new multi-level context may shape parliamentary representation in the coming years.

1. DEVOLUTION AND THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The constitutional division of powers under the Scotland Act has altered the role and responsibilities of Scottish MPs. Although most Scottish MPs continue to debate and vote on all matters coming before the House of Commons, they are no longer responsible or accountable for legislation on the range of domestic policy areas now devolved to the Scottish Parliament. This might come as a surprise to a casual observer of the recent General Election campaign. The campaigns fought by each of the parties paid little heed to distinctions between devolved and reserved powers. The three British parties each produced a separate manifesto for Scotland; in the Liberal Democrats' case, this came in the form of a supplement to the general manifesto. In the case of the Conservatives and the Labour Party, the format, structure and much of the text was identical in the general manifesto and the Scottish manifesto.¹ These Scottish manifestos included an additional foreword by the (shadow) Secretary of State for Scotland and the party leaders in the Scottish Parliament, with some words and commitments altered to take into account Scotland's institutional distinctiveness and the divergences in party and public policy since devolution. The supplementary manifesto produced by the Liberal Democrats focused upon devolved policy areas, and included a wide range of spending commitments that the Scottish Liberal Democrats would introduce as junior coalition partners in the Scottish Executive *if* the British Liberal Democrats were elected as the UK government. The Scottish National Party, meanwhile, produced a manifesto with commitments on reserved and devolved matters.

¹ *In effect, the general manifestos were English manifestos, but they were not identified as such by any of the parties.*

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Parties and candidates in Scotland thus stood on policy platforms which included pledges on policy areas for which the House of Commons is no longer responsible. This raises questions of democratic accountability. In British General Elections, Scottish voters are not voting for a candidate or a government which will make policy in health, education, or policing in Scotland: these and other domestic policy areas which featured prominently in the election campaign fall under the jurisdiction of the Scottish Executive. Arguably, then, the parties and candidates should compete in British elections only on reserved matters such as defence, immigration, taxation and social security, which fall within the jurisdiction of the body to which they hope to gain election. BBC Scotland had tried to focus on reserved issues; its opinion poll published at the beginning of the campaign sought to identify voter priorities only on those matters which are reserved to Westminster and properly the responsibility of Scottish MPs (ICM/BBC 2005; see Table 1). Some academics, too, have urged politicians to respect the division of responsibilities between reserved and devolved matters (see letter to **The Herald** by Trench and Greer, 16 October 2004).

Indeed, the decision of the parties to campaign on reserved and devolved issues may add to public confusion over the lines of responsibility and accountability for public policy. Scottish MPs are neither responsible for developing policy on Scottish health care, education or other areas devolved to the Scottish Parliament, nor accountable to their electorate for the legislative and policy decisions of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive. However, the line between reserved and devolved issues is often blurred. There is an inevitable interdependence between revenue-raising capacity, which largely rests with the centre, and public spending at both levels. The operation of the Barnett formula ensures that the spending decisions of the UK government on the English health and education systems, for example, have a direct impact upon the amount of money available for spending on these services in Scotland. Thus, the devolution settlement itself makes certain that, even in devolved areas, UK policy-making matters to Scotland. The inter-related nature of politics north and south of the border means that even those policy changes made by the UK government that do not carry major spending repercussions are likely to influence policy debates in Scotland. These interdependences were evident in the poll commissioned by BBC Scotland at the outset of the campaign. All of the questions put to electors were intended to seek their views on reserved matters, yet the top priority for respondents – a willingness to see taxes raised in order to increase spending on health and education – spanned the divide between reserved and

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devolved responsibilities (ICM/BBC 2005; see Table 1). In addition, voters tend to view their elected representatives as advocates for any issue, regardless of whether it is within the legislative jurisdiction of the institution in which they serve. The role of general advocate is one which MPs appear to encourage, with many claiming that voters continue to seek their advice on any issue because the MP is regarded as the most 'senior' of the local representatives (Bradbury and Russell 2005, pp. 12-14).

Table 1
Top Five Priorities of Scottish Voters, %

Raising taxes in order to spend more on health and education	37
Increasing pensions even if it means taxes have to go up	34
Keeping the level of immigration into the country low	23
Introducing some measures, like identity cards, that might reduce everyone's liberty by a small amount but also might improve everyone's security	21
Pulling British troops out of Iraq at the end of this year even if security is still poor	18

Source: ICM/BBC Scotland Poll, April 2005

Nonetheless, in areas that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, there have been some significant divergences in policy between the parties north and south of the border, creating challenges for the parties in the General Election. In spite of devolution, the British party system remains relatively centralised. The parties each have Scottish organisations which enjoy varying degrees of autonomy, but they remain firmly integrated within the respective British party organisations, making it difficult to assert a distinctive policy platform in British election campaigns.

The Scottish Tories have sought to carve out a distinctive identity for themselves in the Scottish Parliament, and their policy platform and rhetoric have tended to be more moderate and 'one nation' conservative than their counterparts in Westminster. Yet that distinctiveness was all but lost in the election campaign as the British Conservatives' campaign themes, such as

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stricter immigration controls, school discipline and law and order, assumed prominence. The Liberal Democrats faced fewer challenges than the others. As a federal party, it ought in any case to be better able to deal with policy differences at the Scottish and British level, but, ironically, it had less need to. The party's programme north and south of the border shares many similarities and many of the key electoral commitments of the British party, including the abolition of up-front tuition fees, free personal care for the elderly, and free eye and dental checks, had already been taken on board by the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition government in Scotland. In addition, by producing a supplementary Scottish manifesto which focused almost entirely on devolved issues, the Liberal Democrats were free to boast about their experience in government, emphasising policy achievements without having to defend policy failures.

The Labour Party, by contrast, did not get off so lightly. The similarity in the organization of Labour's manifesto merely accentuated north-south differences, often in ways which were less than flattering to Labour in Scotland. So, whereas the general (English) manifesto could claim that Labour had 'doubled transport spending since 1997', in Scotland, where transport expenditure increases have been lower, the text was altered to say that Labour had 'increased transport investment since 1997'. Likewise, where the English manifesto could claim that 'spending on the NHS has *more than* doubled' since 1997, the Scottish text was changed to indicate that 'spending on the NHS in Scotland *has almost* doubled' (Labour Party 2005, pp. 24, 11; Scottish Labour Party 2005, pp. 28, 13; italics added). Most controversially, in health care, the English manifesto included a commitment to ensure that, by 2008, NHS patients would face a maximum waiting time of 18 weeks 'from the time they are referred for a hospital operation by their GP until the time they have that operation'. In the Scottish manifesto, the commitment was diluted to a promise that, by the end of 2007, 'no NHS patient will have to wait longer than 18 weeks from GP referral until their first outpatient appointment' (Labour Party 2005, p. 58; Scottish Labour Party 2005, p. 61). As First Minister, Jack McConnell, was forced to concede at his party's manifesto launch, this effectively meant Labour's pledge for a waiting time guarantee for Scottish patients would be 18 weeks from referral to a first appointment, and an additional 18 weeks from appointment to treatment – twice as long as the waiting time guarantee offered to English patients (**The Scotsman** 15 April 2005).

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These differences in health policy and outcomes dogged the Labour Party's campaign in Scotland, and highlight the challenge of maintaining a centralised party campaign when policy responsibilities are split between different tiers of democratically elected government. Although the amount of money available for Scottish health spending is determined by the UK government², the development and management of the Scottish health care system is entirely a matter for the Scottish Executive. Significant differences have emerged in the two governments' approach to the health service (Greer 2004, 2005). The UK Labour government has implemented radical reforms in England, re-introducing the internal market, and building capacity and competition within the NHS by using private providers to fast-track routine diagnostics and treatment and reduce waiting times. A scheme of ambitious, centrally-driven targets has been accompanied by the devolution of responsibility and management of the NHS to Primary Care Trusts, rewarding the best performers with greater fiscal autonomy and 'foundation' status, and penalising those who fail to meet targets. The Scottish Executive's policy, by contrast, has rejected market-driven approaches in favour of a partnership with health care professionals built around 15 health boards. While not immune to a target-setting culture, the Executive has prioritised Scotland's three biggest 'killer diseases' – cancer, cardiac disease and stroke – while promoting a public health agenda to tackle ill health resulting from poor diet, smoking and alcohol. This has left the more politically problematic issue of longer waiting times largely unresolved.

In spite (or perhaps because) of these differences, the health issue was certain to be a dominant feature of Labour's campaign in Scotland, especially after the Prime Minister made promotion of the English NHS reforms the focus of his address to the Scottish Labour conference one month before the campaign (Blair 2005). The First Minister tried to defend the Scottish Executive's policy by suggesting that his waiting time guarantee would be met a year earlier than in England, and new targets would be set in 2007 (**The Scotsman** 15 April 2005). A stronger defence might have been to emphasise the public service ethos underlying the Scottish policy or to point out, as a voter memorably did to the Prime Minister on Question Time, some of the

² *Decisions over English health spending have knock-on effects (Barnett consequential) for the overall level of the block grant transferred to the Scottish Executive. The Executive, however, is free to distribute its budget as it sees fit.*

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anomalies associated with a target-obsessed market-based approach.³ Yet, such a defence would have implied criticism of his own party's policy for England, which the Labour-led Executive has been reluctant to do at any time, let alone in the middle of a British General Election. Instead, Scotland's First Minister had to suffer the indignity of being publicly instructed by the Secretary of State for Scotland to sort out the Scottish health service (**The Herald** 7 May 2005).

Challenges such as these will always be evident as long as multi-level politics is combined with a centralised party system. This combination gives rise to two competing pressures. On the one hand, the particular institutional and political context in which state and sub-state politics takes shape generates pressure for divergence in public policies north and south of the border (Keating et al 2004). This creates challenges for centralised political parties seeking to present a single coherent platform in British elections. On the other hand, the shared identity and organisation of the parties at the British and Scottish level, and the perceived need for those parties to speak with one voice in election campaigns, limits the extent to which intra-party policy divergences may be tolerated.

2. FROM 2005 TO 2007: INTERPRETING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ELECTION RESULTS

British General Elections are primarily a contest between parties fighting to form the next UK government. The election of Scottish MPs plays an important part in that contest, not least in boosting the number of Labour MPs at Westminster. However, a parallel election contest between the parties within Scotland is also a test of the relative strength of the Scottish parties and a measure of which party can best speak for Scotland within the Union. The results of the election in Scotland are set out in Table 2 (see also Denver, this volume, for a detailed statistical analysis of local and national results).

Each of the main parties could claim something from the General Election result. Labour clearly remains by far the dominant party in Scotland in terms

³ *During the Question Time Leaders' special, voters pointed out that, because of the need to meet targets, it was difficult to arrange an appointment with a GP more than 48 hours in advance, forcing the Prime Minister to concede that the logic was absurd and the government's targets had been 'too crude' (BBC News 29 April 2005).*

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of its share of votes and seats. Its 38.9% vote share is some 16% higher than its nearest rival, and the party has more than two thirds of the Scottish seats in Westminster. Labour's share of the vote fell across the Britain, but the 4.4% drop in Scotland was lower than in England and Wales, where the party's vote share decreased by 5.9%. The First Past the Post system flatters Labour in Scotland. If the electoral system were directly proportional, the party would have 23 of the 59 Scottish seats, instead of the 40 seats it currently holds.

Table 2
General Election Result in Scotland, 2005

	% share of vote	No. of seats	Notional change in no. of seats ^a	% share of seats
Labour	38.9	40	-5	67.8
SNP	17.7	6	+2	10.2
Liberal Democrats	22.6	11	+2	18.6
Conservatives	15.8	1	+1	1.7
Scottish Socialist Party	1.9	-	-	-
Scottish Green Party ^b	1.1	-	-	-
Other (inc. Speaker)		1	0	1.7

Source: *Mellows-Fraser et al (2005)*

Notes: (a) Changes in the number of seats are on the basis of notional 2001 results calculated by *Denver et al (2004)*, to take into account the reduction in the number of Scottish Westminster MPs from 73 to 59.

(b) The Scottish Green Party secured an average share of the vote of 3.5% across the 19 constituencies in which it fielded candidates.

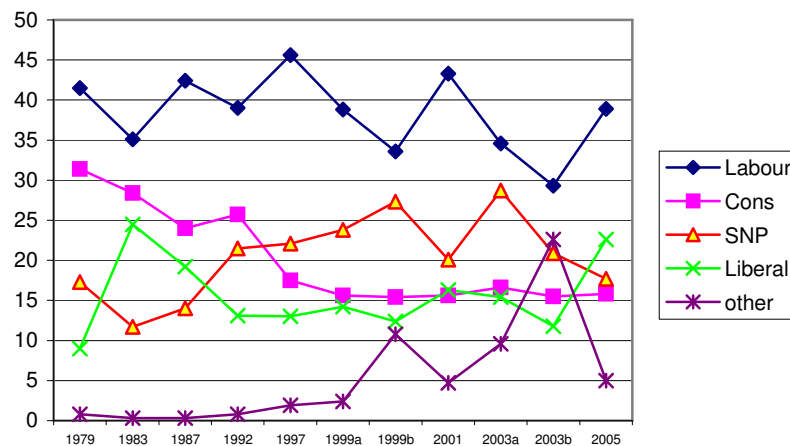
The Liberal Democrats had much to celebrate from the election in Scotland, increasing their share of the vote by 6.3% and (notionally) gaining two seats from Labour – East Dunbartonshire and Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey. Although not quite reaching the heights of SDP/Liberal Alliance success in the 1983 election, the increase in the party's share of the vote was higher in Scotland than other parts of Britain, and the party's 22.6% of the

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Scottish vote is now broadly in line with its vote share in England. Four of the party's Scottish seats – Ross, Skye and Lochaber; Edinburgh West; North East Fife; and Orkney and Shetland – are the British party's safest seats (Mellows-Fraser et al 2005, p. 34). Most importantly with regard to the contest in Scotland, the party beat the SNP into second place.

In spite of slipping to third place for the first time since the 1992 election, the SNP could take solace from gaining two seats from Labour – Dundee East and Na h-Eileanan an Iar, winning the latter with an 8 percentage point increase in its share of the vote. Mitchell suggested that these successes reflected a shift in the SNP's strategy, with the leadership sacrificing some of the party's overall share of the vote to an aggressive targeting of key constituencies (Mitchell 2005, p. 105).

Figure 1
Election Trends in Scotland, 1979-2005



Notes: All years represent Westminster General Elections except 1999 and 2003, which are Scottish Parliament election results. 1999a and 2003a are results from the constituency vote, while 1999b and 2003b are results from the regional list vote.

Even the Conservatives could take heart from at least still having a presence in Scotland. The single seat the Conservatives had won in 2001 notionally disappeared when the boundaries were redrawn, but the party gained the new

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seat of Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale electing an MP, David Mundell, who had hitherto served the area as a regional member of the Scottish Parliament.

Yet, with the possible exception of the Liberal Democrats, there were worrying signs for all of the parties as well. The Labour Party's share of the Scottish vote is its lowest in a British General Election since 1983. The geography of Westminster representation is also problematic for Labour, making it increasingly a party of the central belt. By losing Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey to the Liberal Democrats and Na h-Eileanan an Iar to the SNP, the party now has no Westminster representative from the Highlands and Islands, while the retirement of Brian Wilson from parliamentary politics leaves the party in Westminster without an influential advocate for the region.

The geography of representation is also problematic for the SNP. The party's heartland is increasingly the North East of Scotland, the only region where the party saw an increase in its share of the vote (see Denver, this volume). Since the 1997 General Election, the SNP has made much of its status as the second party of Scotland, and the main opposition to Labour, and coming third in the 2005 election is a blow. It reflects the difficulties the SNP, in particular, faces in the context of Westminster elections. With the issue of Scottish home rule off the agenda, the British dimension of Scottish politics has assumed centre stage. This makes it very difficult terrain for the SNP. The party's efforts to 'make Scotland matter' may have been tied to specific constituency-related concerns in some cases (as in, for example, areas most affected by the planned merger of the historic Scottish regiments), but it was a rather vague appeal without much of a hook that could give it resonance in the rest of the country.

However, the Conservatives will be the most dismayed by the result. As the alternative party of government, British elections should be fertile ground for the Conservatives. Yet, for the second election in succession, the party came fourth in Scotland, with a percentage share of the vote which is even lower than its vote share in the 1997 General Election when it lost office and all of its Scottish seats. The party's campaign may have contributed to this result. The distinctive identity the Scottish Conservatives have developed since devolution under David McLetchie's leadership may have helped them restore some credibility in the Scottish Parliament, but this distinctiveness was all but buried in a campaign in which Michael Howard and Peter Duncan, the sole Scottish Tory MP from 2001-2005, took centre stage. In spite of the

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latter's role as Scottish Party Chairman and Shadow Scottish Secretary, and his visibility in the media during the election campaign, he lacked the public recognition and charisma necessary to promote and personify a distinctive Scottish message (Mitchell 2005, p. 105).

This parallel election contest between the parties in Scotland can give us an indication of the relative strength and standing of the parties, but it is unlikely to foretell much about the Scottish Parliament elections in 2007. Scottish parliamentary elections take place within a different institutional and political context, which affects the strategies and opportunities available to each party. As Figure 1 reveals, the Labour Party has tended to perform less well in Scottish elections, in large part because the SNP has tended to fare better than in Westminster elections. Indeed, as a Scottish party and the alternative party of government, we should expect the SNP to attract more support in elections to the Scottish Parliament than in a Westminster election. Conversely, the Liberal Democrats success in 2005 may be more difficult to repeat in 2007 when the party will have to defend its record in government with an as yet untested leader. We can expect an interesting contest between the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats to see who gets the credit for the Executive's more popular policies and who gets the blame for its failures. The small parties, too, largely absent in the recent Westminster election, may once again find a voice and an audience in 2007. Multi-level politics is often associated with multi-level voting behaviour, and the parties will have to adapt their strategies accordingly.

3. REPRESENTATION IN A MULTI-LEVEL POLITY

One of the most distinctively Scottish aspects of the election was the reduction in the number of Scottish MPs from 72 to 59. Prior to devolution, Scotland had been guaranteed at least 71 Westminster MPs. This gave Scots disproportionately more MPs per head of population, partly in recognition of Scotland's status as a nation within the United Kingdom and in view of the separate stream of Scottish legislation which passed through Westminster. The establishment of the Scottish Parliament removed the rationale for this disproportionate representation. The 1998 Scotland Act, which established the Parliament, paved the way for a decline in the number of Scottish MPs by providing that the electoral quota for England be used to determine the appropriate number of seats for Scotland. As a result of the review, only three of the pre-existing parliamentary constituencies survived with their

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boundaries intact (Boundary Commission for Scotland 2004; Denver et al 2004).⁴

It had been anticipated that the reduction in the number of Scottish Westminster seats might create tensions among incumbent MPs seeking re-election, particularly within the Labour Party where many MPs had represented their communities in Parliament for many years. In the event, bitter internecine conflict was avoided when many of those affected opted for retirement or stood aside, with only three – Irene Adams in Renfrewshire, Malcolm Savidge in Aberdeen and Jimmy Wray in Glasgow – battling unsuccessfully for selection to one of the newly created constituencies (Mitchell 2005, p. 100).

Tensions may yet emerge, however, in the relationship between MPs and MSPs. The Scotland Act had provided for the reduction in the number of Scottish MPs to be combined with a reduction in the number of constituency MSPs, thus retaining coterminosity between Westminster and Scottish Parliament constituency boundaries. However, it was feared that cutting the number of MSPs would have a detrimental impact on the work of the Parliament, and following intensive lobbying by the Scottish Parliament, channelled through the Scotland Office, an amendment was made to the Scotland Act to retain the number of MSPs at 129. As a result, the boundaries of Westminster and Scottish Parliament constituencies are no longer coterminous.

Whether non-coterminosity has any effect upon the quality of representation remains an open question⁵, but it will certainly pose a challenge to the working practices of elected representatives. Analysis of the relationship

⁴ *At the time of the Boundary Commission for Scotland's review, the quota was 69,934 electors per constituency. This compared with an average of 55,434 electors per Scottish constituency prior to the review. Some concessions for remoteness remain. This is most evident in the constituencies of Orkney and Shetland, and Na h-Eileanan an Iar, which survived as two distinct constituencies in spite of the number of electors being substantially less than the quota (Boundary Commission for Scotland 2004).*

⁵ *This is an issue currently under consideration by the Commission on Boundary Differences and Voting Systems (Arbuthnott Commission), of which the author is a member. The Commission is due to report in January 2006.*

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between MPs and MSPs suggests that many share offices and staff resources, jointly attend local community meetings and liaise over constituency work, particularly in areas where the constituency MP and MSP represent the same party (Bradbury and Russell 2005, pp. 14-18). Non-coterminosity makes this more difficult to manage given that MPs will now be expected to liaise with several constituency members of the Scottish Parliament. As Table 3 illustrates, all but two MPs will share their constituency with more than one MSP, and one of the new Westminster constituencies, Glasgow South, encompasses all or part of five Scottish Parliament constituencies. The Labour Party is over-represented in Scottish Parliament constituencies, as in Westminster, but non-coterminosity will also make it likely in the longer term that the partisan allegiances of MPs and MSPs will differ more frequently. Already variation has emerged here: 24 Westminster seats now comprise areas where one opposing party is represented at the constituency level in the Scottish Parliament, while a further five Westminster constituencies in part comprise areas where two opposing parties are represented in Scottish Parliament constituencies (ibid., pp. 63-8).

Table 3
Non-Coterminosity of Constituency Boundaries

No. of Westminster constituencies comprising one SP constituency	2
No. of Westminster constituencies comprising all/part of two SP constituencies	31
No. of Westminster constituencies comprising all/part of three SP constituencies	22
No. of Westminster constituencies comprising part of four SP constituencies	3
No. of Westminster constituencies comprising part of five SP constituencies	1

Source: derived from Bradbury and Russell (2005, appendix 2, pp.63-8).

The West Lothian Question may give rise to a further challenge to the legitimacy of the work of Scottish MPs within Parliament. Although directly accountable to their constituents only on matters that are reserved to the UK Parliament under the devolution settlement, Scotland's 59 MPs have equality of status with other members and they are free to participate, debate and vote

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in all matters, including matters which are devolved to the Scottish Parliament. As a consequence, Scottish MPs are involved in making legislation on domestic policy which directly affects only the constituents of their English (or English and Welsh) colleagues. The Conservatives have sought to make political capital out of the perceived illegitimacy of this practice, but the size of Labour's parliamentary majority since 1997 meant that occasions where the votes of Scottish MPs made a difference to the outcome have been rare. One example was when the government narrowly defeated an amendment to remove its proposals for foundation hospitals from the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) bill, relying on the support of 42 Scottish MPs and 25 Welsh MPs, while English MPs, by a majority of one, voted against the Government's position (Lodge et al 2004, pp. 199-201). With a substantially reduced government majority, these occasions may now be more frequent. Moreover, although Labour continues to have more English seats than the Conservatives, the Conservatives marginally secured a higher percentage of the English vote, winning 35.7% to Labour's 35.5% (Mellows-Fraser et al 2005, p. 14). This may add credibility to their complaints regarding the role of Scottish MPs in Westminster and may yet give rise to popular misgivings about England's 'democratic deficit' within the new constitutional framework.

CONCLUSION

Devolution has transformed the UK into a multi-level polity. Elections at each level do not take place in isolation, but they are conducted within different institutional and political contexts. These contexts create distinctive challenges and opportunities for the political parties and influence the likely voting behaviour of the electorate. Much of the political focus since 1999 has been on adapting strategies to compete in Scottish Parliament elections. With varying degrees of success, political parties have sought to respond to and exploit the challenges and opportunities of competing in a specifically Scottish context under a proportional electoral system. Changes in electoral strategies have been less evident at the Westminster level, particularly for the British parties. Indeed, the most evident change is for the Scottish organisations to play a more subordinate role and allow the British party's themes to dominate the Westminster campaign north and south of the border. This may have boosted the Scottish Liberal Democrats, given that the British Liberal Democrat campaign trumpeted many of the policies that the Scottish party could claim to have achieved as a coalition partner in the Scottish

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Executive. By contrast, it had a detrimental impact on the Labour and Conservative campaigns, in Labour's case, by highlighting the apparent inadequacies of Labour in the Scottish Executive, and in the Conservatives case, by failing to highlight the policy deviations of the Scottish Tories in the Scottish Parliament that might have made the party more palatable to Scottish voters.

These difficulties will always emerge as long as multi-level politics is combined with a centralised party system. The Liberal Democrats are the least centralised of the parties and, in theory, best able to adapt to the challenges of intra-party policy divergences should they emerge in the future. The Labour Party is the most centralised, with signs of some tension during the campaign between the Labour leadership in the Scottish Executive and the UK government. In spite of the tensions, the personalities and demands of government at both levels make a change in the territorial structure of the Labour Party unlikely in the short term. By contrast, the poor showing of the Scottish Conservatives has encouraged dissident voices within its ranks to call for greater distance between the Scottish and English party as a path towards a Tory revival in Scotland. It may be easier for the Conservative Party to contemplate and openly debate such changes. Reform and renewal is facilitated by opposition status. Moreover, the Westminster party has increasingly become an English party with respect to its electoral strength, representation and policy orientation. An appeal to English voters on this basis may become increasingly attractive, especially if Gordon Brown does eventually become Prime Minister. Thus, a break between the English and Scottish Conservatives might potentially be to their mutual benefit.

This article has sought to highlight some of the electoral challenges facing the parties as a result of multi-level politics. These challenges are evident in the organisation and presentation of the party campaigns, and are reflected in their performances at the polls. Multi-level politics has also affected the role and responsibilities of Scottish MPs, producing new anomalies within the system such as the West Lothian Question, although questioning the legitimacy of their right to participate fully in parliamentary debate has yet to be seriously heard beyond the ranks of the Conservative Party. Relations with elected members of the Scottish Parliament are also set to become more complex under the new Westminster constituency boundaries, almost all of which now encompass at least two Scottish Parliament constituencies. These challenges illustrate the complexities of politics in a multi-level system, but it is important to underline that *none* of these complexities need be problematic

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or destabilising. Rather, they are a normal consequence of multi-tiered politics. How well the parties adapt to this new context may have a bearing on their electoral fortunes in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to James Mitchell and Lindsay Paterson for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

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